

PAGE 3-A

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# More Americans believe U.S. uses 'disinformation'

By Bill Gertz  
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The number of Americans who believe the U.S. government uses "disinformation"—false or misleading information—rose sharply last year, according to the results of a public opinion poll on national security issues.

The poll, taken last November by Gary C. Lawrence Co. of Santa Ana, Calif., found that nearly half the American public thinks the U.S. government is likely to "deliberately use misleading information to deceive other nations' leaders and people."

The shift in opinion marked an increase of 11 percent since a similar poll was taken last March.

By contrast, public attitudes toward the Soviets' use of disinformation remained unchanged between March and November with 93 percent of the American people perceiving the Soviets as likely to use false information as a matter of public policy.

Ninety percent of those polled suspect the Soviets manipulate information released to the public and 56 percent believe the U.S. government does the same.

Roy Godson, Washington director of the National Strategy Information Center, a sponsor of the survey, called the poll results on U.S. government credibility "an unusual jump in public opinion" over a span of a few months.

He attributed the change to revelations last fall that the White House planned a secret strategic deception program aimed at destabilizing the Libyan government, and general public disapproval over the administration's handling of the Iran arms affair.

The poll was based on a random survey of 1,000 people in telephone interviews, and was taken prior to administration revelations that proceeds from the Iran arms sales may have been diverted to the Nicaraguan resistance, Mr. Godson said.

"I think one could say as a general conclusion that the American people are growing increasingly skeptical of U.S. government information," said Mr. Godson, who has published several studies on Soviet disinformation.

Mr. Godson said the poll results may provide fuel for critics of the United States who believe false arguments about the "moral equivalence" between the U.S. and Soviet governments.

"This is unfortunate and what is being lost sight of is the fact that Moscow operates very differently," he said. "Needless to say, Moscow is already exploiting this in its own propaganda... to justify its own attempts to discredit the United States."

On the question of building strategic defenses, the poll found that 80 percent of the American people believe the Soviets are conducting research on an anti-missile defense system. Of that group, 63 percent believe the Soviets trail the United States in anti-missile technologies.

"Many people thought the administration has not done a good job explaining that Soviets' defensive buildup," Mr. Godson said. "But polling data indicate that the American people are aware the Soviets are doing research."

The CIA estimates that Soviet anti-missile technological developments in some key areas, such as



Roy Godson

particle beams and microwave research, "may have an edge over the U.S." Soviet directed-energy technologies are "comparable, or highly competitive," to U.S. capabilities, a 1985 CIA report said.

In 1981, Moscow launched a massive public campaign against the Strategic Defense Initiative anti-missile shield, accusing the administration of "militarizing space." U.S. officials say they [the Soviets] have tried to hide their own major research and development program that has been under way since the 1960s.